

HEALTHCARE

The second area that drives that operating side of the budget is the cost of services, whether it is healthcare that we provide at the prison or whether it is nursing home beds that we pay for, all those costs go up over and over and over again. Particularly on the medical side, the cost increases are substantial.

I obviously significantly reduced the healthcare budget request submitted by the department. The Appropriations Committee chose to reduce it more. I think that the Appropriations Committee, though, also took a proper tack in setting aside money in the auditor's budget so that, in the event that either they were wrong or I was wrong about the funding of the mandatory Medicaid programs, there's money available. Between personnel costs and the purchase of services, particularly medical-related services, that's what's driving the operating side of the budget. That's where the increases are in terms of the large amounts of money that are expended. But it is a simple fact that nursing home beds cost more, healthcare costs more, prison healthcare costs more, and if we're going to be like any other business, we either pay those costs or we get out of that business.

HEALTHCARE – TORT REFORM

One of those is healthcare. Healthcare will continue to be a major issue in our state's future. If there is one issue that will touch the lives of each and every one of us in this chamber, and each person in this state, it is healthcare. Healthcare will affect our quality of life, our mortality, our economic future, our jobs, our parents and our children. Staggering increases in insurance costs will drag down family budgets as well as the state's budgets. Failure to take steps to deal with this will cause a domino effect of uncertainty and financial calamity. This legislative body created a Healthcare Commission that is taking action to promote solutions. I hope that you will support our recommendations to continue the funding of this commission as it moves forward.

The commission has formally suggested, and I support, placing before the voters a constitutional amendment that would allow us to address one narrow, but incredibly contentious, aspect of this crisis. If adopted, this constitutional amendment would allow this body, should it choose, to consider caps on non-economic damage awards in medical malpractice cases or to establish a medical review panel. The proposed amendment – which by itself changes no statutory or case law, imposes no limits and creates no panel – was passed out of committee by an overwhelmingly favorable vote, and I encourage you to approve this measure so our citizens can decide if they wish to put these two issues on the table as part of the solution.

Is this a magic bullet that will remedy our healthcare crisis? No, not by itself, and nobody suggests that it is. But it would give us a critical tool in the toolbox as we fashion solutions going forward. Voting for this amendment is not voting for caps, it is not voting for a medical review panel – it is voting to place before the voters the opportunity for the citizens of this state to give us instruction about how they want us to proceed on this

critical issue. It is not, and I repeat, it is *not* inappropriate to ask the voter to make this decision. I'm heard it said that it's too complicated an issue, the voter won't understand it, they can't make the decision.

I beg to differ. Each of us in this room applauds the wisdom of the voter upon that evening in which they elevate us to our position. We say that the voters were so smart because they elected us. And now we're going to turn around and say that this is an issue that the voter is not able to comprehend and to make their own decision about? It is an incredibly contentious issue and one that I think the voter ought to be given the opportunity to instruct you as legislators and me as governor on whether they even want us to look at it. If they stand up and say no, that's a pretty clear signal. If they say yes, that's the beginning of a conversation about what, if anything, either this body or the governor will choose to do in that area. This is an issue that haunts us every time we try to talk about healthcare. Let's get it before the voter, let's get it resolved, and let's move on to the other important issues of the healthcare debate.